

Listing of the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1. (Currently amended) A method of safely removing at least one volatile oxidizable compound which can form an explosive mixture with oxygen from particles (2) present in a container (1), in which a gas stream is introduced into the container (1), the gas stream takes up the oxidizable compounds from the particles (2) and a gas stream laden with the volatile oxidizable compounds is discharged from the container (1),

wherein
 - (i) oxygen is added to the gas stream which has been discharged and the volatile oxidizable compounds present in the discharged gas stream are at least partly catalytically oxidized by means of the oxygen, thereby forming an oxidized gas stream; and
 - (ii) the oxidized gas stream forms at least part of the gas stream introduced into the container (1), so that the gas stream is circulated in a circuit,
and wherein the concentration of oxygen in the container (1) is below the explosive limit of about 7% by volume.
2. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the particles are polymer particles (2) and the volatile oxidizable compounds are at least one of residual monomers and solvents remaining in the polymer particles (2) after they have been produced.
3. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 2, wherein the polymer particles are solid polymer granules (2).
4. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 2, wherein the particles are sprayed liquid or wax-like polymer particles.

5. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the oxygen is added to the volatile oxidizable compounds in an essentially stoichiometric amount corresponding to that required for complete oxidation.
6. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the oxygen is added in the form of air.
7. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the amount of added oxygen is regulated on the basis of the content of oxygen and the volatile oxidizable compound measured in the oxidized gas stream.
8. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the oxidation is carried out with the aid of a catalyst whose active component comprises at least one noble metal selected from the group consisting of platinum, palladium and rhodium.
9. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the particles (2) are continuously introduced into the container (1) and discharged from the container (1).
10. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 8, wherein the gas stream is conveyed in countercurrent to the particles (2).
11. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 1 having a preceding start-up phase in which the circuit is purged with an inert gas.
12. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 11, wherein an oxygen content in the container (1) is increased continuously to a level of from 0.5 to 5% by volume during the start-up phase and is subsequently kept constant.
13. (Withdrawn).
14. (Withdrawn).

15. (Withdrawn).

16. (Withdrawn).

17. (Withdrawn).

18. (Withdrawn).

19. (Previously presented) The method of claim 3 wherein the polymer granules are polyolefin granules.

20. (Previously presented) The method of as claimed in claim 11 wherein the inner gas is nitrogen.

21. (Previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 12, wherein the oxygen content in the container (1) is from 1 to 4% by volume.